

PATENT APPLICATION
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UNITED STATES PATENT APPLICATION

OF

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FOR

**SYSTEM AND METHOD TO COMMUNICATE ABSORBENT
PRODUCT FEATURES TO CONSUMERS**

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BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

5 The present invention relates to packaging of absorbent products and methods of communicating absorbent product features to customers.

 A broad range of absorbent products exists in the art. Examples of commonly available absorbent products include adult care products such as incontinence pads; child care products such as diapers and training pants;
10 feminine care products such as sanitary pads, panty liners, inter-labial absorbent articles, and tampons; and other absorbent products such as bathroom tissue, paper towels, hand wipes, face wipes, perineal wipes, facial tissue, wound care dressings, and bandages. These products are commonly available for retail sale through grocery stores, convenience stores, supermarkets, and other retail outlets.

15 Each absorbent product may include various combinations of qualities, features, and/or characteristics designed to improve the performance, comfort, quality, and/or appearance of the product. By their nature, absorbent products are personal and private items, and consumers often have strong purchase preferences for the various qualities, features, and/or characteristics available in
20 the absorbent products.

 Manufacturers continually develop, refine, and improve the qualities, features, and/or characteristics of absorbent products. Manufacturers package absorbent products in sealed containers, such as boxes, bags, or wrappers, to ensure cleanliness and sanitation. Typically, the container holds multiple
25 absorbent products having identical qualities, features, and/or characteristics. The product packaging generally includes a description of the particular absorbent product; however, the product packaging necessarily prevents the consumer from directly sensing the various qualities, features, and/or characteristics of the product prior to purchase.

30 As a result, consumers must select and purchase a particular product based solely on the product promotion and description present on the packaging without the ability to directly touch, see, and inspect the product. Consumers who cannot

read, are in too much of a hurry to read, have poor vision, or otherwise forego reading the description on the product packaging may select and purchase a particular product without directly touching or inspecting the product. This may result in embarrassment, distress, confusion, or mistakes in selecting a particular absorbent product for purchase and use. Therefore, the need exists for an improved packaging system and method to communicate the qualities, features, and/or characteristics of absorbent products to consumers prior to purchase.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

Objects and advantages of the invention are set forth below in the following description, or may be obvious from the description, or may be learned through practice of the invention.

In one embodiment of the invention, a packaging system for absorbent products includes an absorbent product, a container enclosing the absorbent product, and a consumer message label attached to the container. The consumer message label includes a swatch containing a predetermined feature that is available for direct sensory touch by the consumer without opening the container. The consumer product label may optionally include a backing surface and/or a cover having an aperture through which the swatch is directly available, by touch and/or sight, to the consumer. In a particular embodiment, the absorbent product in the container is a feminine care product. In other embodiments, the container and/or the consumer message label may include advertising, printed or embossed, of the predetermined product feature. Optionally, the consumer message label may be removable from the container without damaging the container.

The invention also encompasses an improved method for communicating an absorbent product feature to a consumer. This method includes selecting a first absorbent product feature for communication to the consumer, enclosing an absorbent product in a container, creating a consumer message label, and obtaining and attaching a sample containing the absorbent product feature to the consumer message label. Using this method, the consumer can directly contact the sample containing the absorbent product feature without opening the container. This method may also include advertising the absorbent product feature

on the consumer message label. Furthermore, the method may permit replacing the consumer message label with a different consumer message label bearing a different absorbent product feature for communication to the consumer.

Those of ordinary skill in the art will better appreciate the features and aspects of such embodiments, and others, upon review of the specification.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE FIGURES

A full and enabling disclosure of the present invention, including the best mode thereof to one skilled in the art, is set forth more particularly in the remainder of the specification, including reference to the accompanying figures, in which:

Figure 1 is a perspective view of an embodiment of the present invention;

Figure 2 is a perspective view of an alternate embodiment of the present invention; and

Figure 3 is an exploded perspective view of a portion of the embodiment depicted in Figures 1 and 2.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE INVENTION

Reference will now be made in detail to present embodiments of the invention, one or more examples of which are illustrated in the accompanying drawings. Each example is provided by way of explanation of the invention, not limitation of the invention. In fact, it will be apparent to those skilled in the art that modifications and variations can be made in the present invention without departing from the scope or spirit thereof. For instance, features illustrated or described as part of one embodiment may be used on another embodiment to yield a still further embodiment. Thus, it is intended that the present invention covers such modifications and variations as come within the scope of the appended claims and their equivalents.

Figures 1 and 2 illustrate a packaging system 10 according to an embodiment of the present invention. The packaging system 10 communicates a predetermined quality, feature, and/or characteristic of an absorbent product to consumers prior to purchase. The predetermined quality, feature, and/or characteristic may exist in the absorbent product contained therein, may exist in a related absorbent product, or may be planned for a future absorbent product.

The packaging system **10** generally includes a container **20** and a consumer message label **30**.

The container **20** is configured for receipt of one or more absorbent products therein. The container **20** may take on any manner of conventional package, such as the box illustrated in Figure 1 or a soft-side package or bag illustrated in Figure 2. These types of containers are well known and used in the industry, and a detailed description thereof is not necessary for purposes of understanding the present invention.

The container **20** includes an external surface **22**. The external surface **22** may include product information, advertisement, and/or promotional language. The product information, advertisement, and/or promotional language may pertain to the absorbent product contained therein, a related absorbent product, a future absorbent product, or a competitor's product, by way of comparison and contrast. Alternately, the external surface **22** may simply include a nondescript, aesthetic configuration over at least a substantial portion thereof that does not advertise or otherwise give an indication of the absorbent products within the container **20**. For example, in the embodiment illustrated in Figures 1 and 2, the nondescript surface configuration is a floral pattern **24**. It should be appreciated that any combination of patterns, colors, etc. may be utilized in this regard to provide a generally pleasing and nondescript surface configuration for the container **20**.

Figure 3 illustrates an embodiment of the consumer message label **30** within the scope of a particular embodiment of the present invention. As shown, the consumer message label **30** includes a backing surface **40**, a swatch **50**, and a cover **60**. It should be understood by one of ordinary skill in the art that alternate embodiments of the consumer message label **30** within the scope of the present invention may include other combinations of the backing surface **40**, swatch **50**, and cover **60**. For example, in an alternate embodiment, the consumer message label **30** may include only the swatch **50** directly mounted to the external surface **22** of the container **20** without including either a backing surface **40** or a cover **60**. Alternately, the consumer message label **30** may include the swatch **50** with either a backing surface **40** or a cover **60**. In yet another embodiment, the consumer message label **30** may include a plurality of swatches **50**, each depicting a

predetermined quality, feature, and/or characteristic of the absorbent product, a future product, a related product, or a competitor's product.

The consumer message label **30** attaches to any portion of the container **20** and typically occupies a fraction of the area of the external surface **22** to minimize obstruction of any product information, advertisement, promotional language, or aesthetic configuration contained thereon. For example, the consumer message label **30** may attach to the external surface **22** adjacent to product information, advertisement, and/or promotional language directed to the predetermined quality, feature, and/or characteristic being communicated by the package system **10**. Any portion of the consumer message label **30** may also include product information, advertisement, and/or promotional language to complement, contrast, or otherwise supplement information that may be present on the external surface **22** of the container **20**.

The backing surface **40** is an optional component of the consumer message label **30** the provides an interface between the consumer message label **30** and the container **20**. The backing surface **40** includes a product side **42** and a consumer side **44**. The backing surface **40** generally comprises a thin, flexible material made from paper, poly film, or similarly suitable substitute. As such, the backing surface **40** readily conforms to the shape of the external surface **22** of the container **20**.

The product side **42** of the backing surface **40** faces the container **20** and includes a means for attaching **46** the consumer message label **30** to the external surface **22** of the container **20**. The means for attachment **46** may include adhesive, hooks-and-loops, glue, fasteners, staples, bonding agents, or other equivalent materials readily available and known to one of ordinary skill in the art. The means for attachment **46** may be temporary to allow the consumer to remove the consumer message label **30** from the container **20** prior to or after purchase without damaging or compromising the container **20**. Alternately, the means for attachment **46** may be re-usable to allow the manufacturer to selectively substitute consumer message labels containing different qualities, features, and/or characteristics, depending on consumer response and product promotions.

The consumer side **44** of the backing surface **40** faces away from the container **20** and provides a mounting surface for the swatch **50**.

The swatch **50** includes the predetermined quality, feature, and/or characteristic **54** of the absorbent product, a future product, a related product, or a competitor's product for communication to the consumer. The swatch **50** may include a sample of the absorbent product, or the swatch **50** may include a substitute material that possesses the same predetermined quality, feature, and/or characteristic **54** sought to be communicated to the consumer. For example, by way of illustration only and without limiting the scope of the present invention, the swatch **50** may include a portion of a sanitary napkin to provide the consumer an opportunity to directly perceive, inspect, and/or evaluate the texture, thickness, color, shape, construction, appearance, flexibility, abrasiveness, moisture, softness, durability, and/or other predetermined quality, feature, and/or characteristic of the feminine care product. A particular embodiment may also include multiple swatches **50** in the consumer message label **30**, with each swatch **50** possessing a particular quality, feature, and/or characteristic **54** of the absorbent product, a future product, a related product, or a competitor's product for comparison by the consumer.

Depending on the particular embodiment, the swatch **50** attaches to the backing surface **40** (if used) or directly to the external surface **22** of the container **20**. The swatch **50** may include a means for attaching **52** to the consumer side **44** of the backing surface **40** (if used) or directly to the external surface **22** of the container **20**. The means for attachment **52** may include adhesive, hooks-and-loops, glue, fasteners, staples, bonding agents, or other equivalent materials readily available and known to one of ordinary skill in the art. The swatch **50** may attach flush with the backing surface **40** or external surface **22**. Alternately, the swatch **50** may be hinged, creased, folded, or similarly configured so that attachment to the backing surface **40** or external surface **22** presents multiple surfaces of the swatch **50** for sensory perception by the consumer.

The cover **60** is an optional component of the consumer message label **30** that provides additional structure and/or integrity to the consumer message label **30**. The cover **60** attaches to the swatch **50** and/or the backing surface **40** and/or the external surface **22** of the container **20**, depending on the particular embodiment. The cover **60** generally comprises a thin, flexible material made from paper, poly film, or similarly suitable substitute. The cover **60** may be die cut and

includes an aperture **62** through which the swatch **50** is directly available to the consumer, both tactilely and visually.

As shown in Figures 1, 2, and 3, the consumer message label **30** may optionally include product information, advertisement, and/or promotional language **32** regarding the predetermined quality, feature, and/or characteristic of the absorbent product, a future product, a related product, or a competitor's product for communication to the consumer. The product information, advertisement, and/or promotional language **32** on the consumer message label **30** is not limited to the predetermined quality, feature, and/or characteristic of the absorbent product and may include reference to related advertisement or promotion communicated to the consumer through alternate media, such as circulars, magazines, newspapers, radio, and television. This product information, advertisement, and/or promotional language **32** may be embossed or printed on the cover **60**, as shown in Figure 3. Alternately, the product information, advertisement, and/or promotional language **32** may be printed on the swatch **50** and/or the consumer side **44** of the backing surface **40**.

As described above and illustrated in Figures 1 and 2, the consumer message label **30** initially draws attention to the package system **10**. In this manner, the consumer message label **30** may communicate to the consumer qualities, features, and/or characteristics of the present absorbent product, future absorbent products, or even related absorbent products. Specifically, the swatch **50** and optional product information, advertisement, or promotional language **32** communicate the predetermined quality, feature, and/or characteristic of the absorbent product to the consumer. In this configuration, the consumer message label **30** allows consumers to directly perceive, inspect, and/or evaluate the predetermined quality, feature, and/or characteristic of the absorbent product prior to purchase. Conversely, the consumer message label **30** allows the manufacturer to direct the consumer's attention to particular qualities, features, and/or characteristics of the absorbent product without having to change or redesign the container **20**.

It should be appreciated by those skilled in the art that modifications and variations can be made to the embodiments of the invention set forth herein

without departing from the scope and spirit of the invention as set forth in the appended claims and their equivalents.